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Letters to the Editor

We Had the Facts on Cuba

To the Herald Tribune:

As a naval reserve intelligence officer, I cannot let Mr. Roscoe Drummond's analysis of the Stennis Subcommittee Report on our intelligence in the Cuban crisis go unchallenged.

Mr. Drummond says "something needs to be done" because of the inability of Mr. John A. McCone and our other intelligence chiefs to "convince" the subcommittee that all Soviet long-range missiles have been removed from Cuba.

Well, this report is a wondrous document: you can prove either side of the question by it. I suppose this comes from a desire for unanimity. But there is a grave question, when as fundamental an issue as the integrity and competence of our nation's intelligence services are concerned, whether the public interest is really served by an inquiry that stops short of a clear-cut verdict just to keep everybody happy.

In any event, one thing is clear: all of the report's conclusions which refute charges against our intelligence services are based on facts, while those which give aid and comfort to the critics are either self-contradictory or rest on nothing more substantial than theoretical skepticism.

Take the matter of strategic missiles. The intelligence chiefs "to a man" conclude these missiles have been removed. To oppose this impressive professional judgment the committee offers only "absolutes" and philosophical skepticism. Theoretically, to be sure, anything is possible. But is this really any way to run a railroad—or a country?

Likewise, the "substantial errors" the committee says resulted from a belief by some intelligence officials that the Soviets would never put missiles in Cuba vanish in the face of facts appearing elsewhere in the same document. For example, from July 1962, on all rumors about such missiles—whether contrary to "subjective" beliefs or not—were "scrupulously" checked out, we are told, with uniformly negative results. Until the pictures came in from that Oct. 14 U-2 flight nobody—either in the Senate or out—had any confirmation of any long-range missile rumors.

So what "substantial errors" were there? What more could intelligence have done, even had they believed otherwise? Should they have represented as confirmed fact rumors for which no confirmation could be found? Or was the subcommittee perhaps indulging some of the Administration's more vocal critics in its midst by taking the intelligence community to task for a failure to manifest psychic powers prior to Oct. 14?

Whatever the ultimate answer to our troublesome problems in Cuba, it can only be complicated by an unwillingness on the part of those in possession of the facts to repudiate unequivocally unfounded charges against an intelligence community that actually turned in a magnificent and highly successful performance last October.

SAMUEL S. STRATTON

Member, Armed Services Committee, United States

House of Representatives.

Washington, D. C.

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